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## WATER TRANSPORTATION IN THIS COUNTRY.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION. F. H. DIXON, *Chairman.*

F. H. DIXON: The subject of Water Transportation in the United States has grown so rapidly in general interest and has come to occupy so much of public attention that it seemed entirely proper to your chairman to make it the basis of discussion in a transportation round table. Attention was sharply directed to the extent and the comparative inutility of our waterways a few years ago, when business was at its height and the railroads were proving themselves unable to meet the traffic requirements, and the interest then aroused has been kept alive by the meetings of various congresses and by individual discussion.

The question has many phases and gives opportunity for the expression of opinion on many fundamental points, economic, financial, and political. The present situation in the United States has undoubtedly been brought about by our *laissez-faire* policy, which has left waterways and railroads to develop practically unaided by government; and I think it will be generally conceded that where inland waterways and railroads are left to private initiative, the waterways will be unable to compete.

The question then arises, Shall the government step in as it has done in the European countries and subsidize the waterways? Will the expenditure justify itself? Granted that the principle can be defended, are there insuperable difficulties of an engineering or physical character that will endanger the success of such projects,

for example, in the case of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers?

Again, shall such work be undertaken by the state or by the federal government? And if the federal government is to assume the task, shall it be proceeded with slowly and experimentally, or shall we enter at once upon a comprehensive plan, which will contemplate, for example, the issue of five hundred millions of bonds?

Such are some of the questions that suggest themselves. We do not propose to solve them today, but I hope we may get some very definite expressions of opinion upon them. We have passed beyond the stage when mere generalizations and unqualified rhapsodies upon the beauties of water transportation are longer of any value. The threadbare statement which is no truer today than when first uttered, that water transportation is inherently cheaper than rail, will not add to our knowledge of the subject. I hope that the discussion will rather take the form of concrete and definite expression of opinions on the questions involved.